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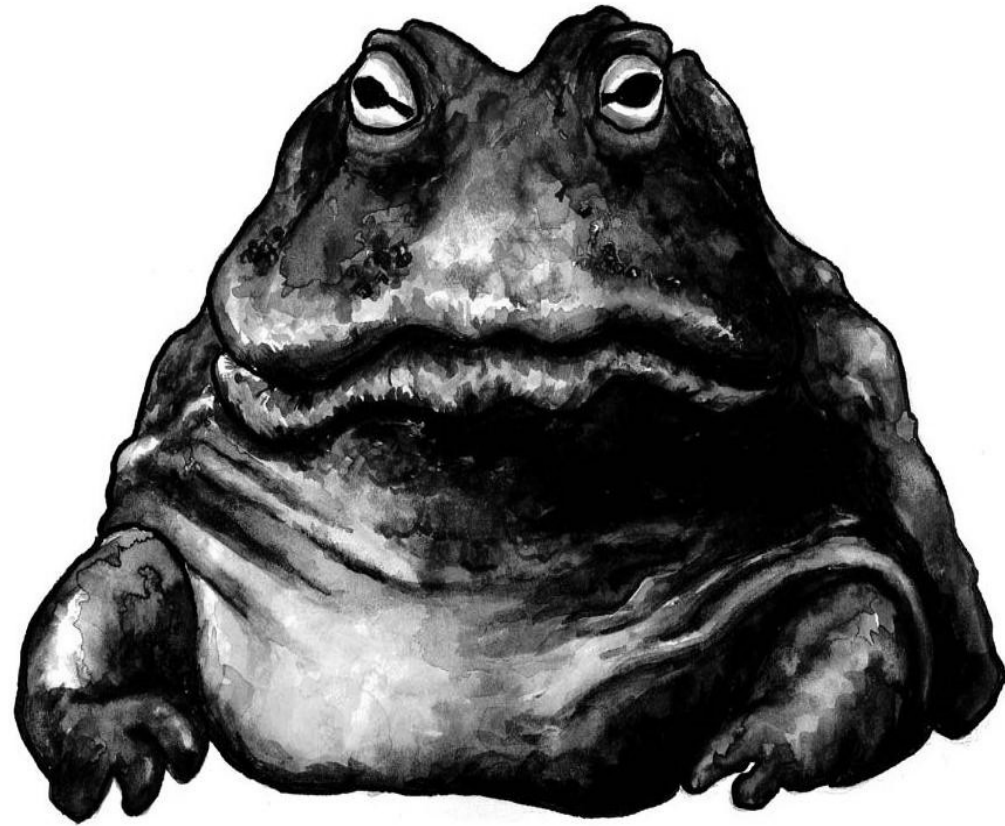
*From Animals to Anarchism* challenges those involved in animal activism to sort their politics out if they truly believe in liberation, but at the same time does not let anarchists off the hook – demanding that they consider more fully the nature of human-animal relations in their politics.

## OPEN LETTERS

The *Dysophia open letters* is a series of occasional articles designed to provoke debate. We publish on topics of current interest among anarchists in greater depth and length than most publications are capable of accommodating.

We seek articles that are neither jargon heavy nor very academic in nature so as to be accessible to as many people as possible. If you are interested in contributing, or responding, please get in contact.

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# from animals to anarchism

Kevin Watkinson & Dónal O'Driscoll

# Dysophia

open letter #3  
October 2014

or causing pain should be necessary, but that is a world of difference from simply allowing it to happen because it is an act of desire. We may have desire, but we are not looking to live in a world where the powerful get their way through might, but one in which we take collective responsibility, and that means towards animals and the environment alike. Otherwise we have retained systems of domination.

None of this is to say there is an endpoint or goal to be reached in the drive towards societies informed by anarchism – there should be a constant evaluation / questioning, revolution even. Critical awareness should be part of everyday living, not simply switched on or off as convenient. Unfortunately, there seems to be a desire to not encourage its development, something carried over from conventional society.

#### **4. Macho naturalism**

In contrast to the above criticisms, this is a set of arguments that come out of the primitivist or naturalist camps and is likely to say things such as animals enjoy being hunted, or that it is somehow natural to dominate animals. To us there is a very dangerous subtext as well as hypocrisy in this approach. The ‘survivalist’ note makes us particularly wary, as it is too often an expression of a desire to dominate, particularly by ‘proving oneself’ over another species, more often than not with macho undertones. This is not a ‘contest of equals’, but the perpetuating of a myth of the right to dominate the environment in the serious delusion that we are entering such remaining and stressed wildlife refuges on equal terms. It amazes us how people who use this argument are equally happily discussing their latest gortex jackets and all the other products of capitalist society which make surviving in the wild that bit easier.

Related to this is talk of ‘animal instincts’ in humans, without recognising the danger such a path takes one down – for some animals cannibalism, rape and eating shit are instinctual, so again what people are cherry picking is not ‘instinct’, but whatever suits us. Rather, this is just escapism, running away from dealing with the problem of tearing down capitalist society.



It can be observed as dogmatically as any other approach. The idea of collective responsibility to each other and the environment / people / animals around us barely gets to raise its head. (We recognise there are those who accept that animal / human relations do need to change on a fundamental level, but this is as far as they go.)

The result is bizarre, with various contortions to try and justify their positions to themselves, such as the unnecessary killing and inflicting of pain being acceptable or indeed life affirming, or an 'anti-morality' stance that reduces their anarchist politics to nihilism. It seems to us that what is going on is rather than face up to the challenge asked by animal activism of re-evaluating our relationship with the environment and the animals in it, they instead believe it is more important for a conservative defence of what they have decided they are going to believe in. Conservative because they are unwilling to question the basic assumptions of their own ideology in the light of human-animal relations, or ask how some of the implicit values such as the right to eat what they want may have been shaped by the liberal-capitalist society they grew up in – while claiming to be seeking to be free of them.

Though some like to say they want to be free of all morals, we doubt if any of them would actually accept that setting two dogs into a pit to fight to the death is anything but wrong. But that is a value judgment in itself. Too often in trying to get rid of all morals imposed on them, they forget that 'morals' is a vague term in itself. It can just as easily be seen as agreed sets of behaviour among each other, which allow us to organise collectively – through recognising differences, and shared experiences of oppression, so that we can respect each other first and foremost, and continuously work out how to do that. Any drive to live in a world of freedom is always going to be tempered by the requirement not to dominate others, or to adopt positions where domination of the environment or animals is equally acceptable. Otherwise, one is espousing, implicitly, the belief that animals do not matter or are somehow inferior – something that is an expression of a moral position in itself as it affects how one makes decisions.

It may be that there are perfectly valid reasons that at some point killing

This is a zine about animal liberation and its relation to anarchism.

The anarchist and animal liberation movements have a great deal in common. Both are built on the notion that structures of domination and control need to be removed. However, there is an enduring reluctance to view the issue of animal liberation as relevant to anarchism, or vice versa. In the following pages we look at some of the ways in which the two movements are allied, whilst exploring some of the critiques that each have of the other. Ultimately, the conflict lies in the way issues have been presented and framed, and there is little reason that anarchism and animal liberation should not make natural allies.

Thus, we should start by saying that for the purpose of this zine we are using the template of animal welfare – animal rights – animal liberation. This is to clarify the differences between each position, as many use the term animal rights as interchangeable with that of animal liberation. So for our definition of rights we mean those things society considers inalienable, but must be guaranteed through law and thus require a state to enforce that law.

We also want to say that we do not think the anarchist movement has taken either animals or animal liberation seriously. This is understandable in the sense that much of animal activism is politically naive, but this does not serve as an excuse for the half-baked arguments and evasiveness demonstrated by many anarchists when faced with the challenges of incorporating animals and the environment into their politics and lifestyles.

Hence, this zine comes in two parts. First we look at the animal activism movement in its various forms and discuss how within the movement they are ideologically different. This shows up the underlying ideas and how we can move away from welfarism and a reliance on human granted 'rights' to a full philosophy of animal liberation. In the second we address some of the arguments adopted by anarchists and argue they are both flawed and misleading.



## *What is anarchism?*

Anarchism in its modern incarnation is broadly seen as a set of ideas around individual liberty, collective action, and the challenge to all structures of hierarchy and domination,<sup>1</sup> particularly that of the state. It rejects solutions which rely on state enforcement, whilst strongly critiquing the state's implicit use of force and coercion to maintain its power. Though anarchism could be charged with once being an identity politics of the working class, it has, for the most part, developed a broad outlook encompassing feminist, anti-racist and more lately environmental critiques, increasingly taking on board the awareness that domination occurs in more than just the workplace and thus needs to be challenged in all aspects of social life, including where non-human animals are concerned.

## *Welfare – Rights – Liberation*

The 'animal rights movement' is a label given to a very broad set of beliefs and campaign activities which focus on the position of animals in human society. It is not a coherent ideology in itself (as say socialism or neoliberalism), but has inherited and adapted various tactics and strategies to a framework which gives animals more prominence. How this happens for the most part, depends on where individuals involved are placed on the political spectrum – whether they believe in a strong, hierarchical state, a liberal representative democracy or no state at all.

At the liberal end are welfarists and reformists who work within the law and the institutions of state to effect change. On the other side, are the liberationists who see the state itself as part of the problem<sup>2</sup> and believe

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular the writings of Elisée Reclus and Gustav Landauer.

<sup>2</sup> We acknowledge that there are those on the liberal side who break the law and engage in direct action. However, their motivation is to bring about a change in the law or alter part of society without wishing to fundamentally change society itself. In one sense this could be considered the 'rights' aspect of animal activism ('animal rights extremists'), but such direct action occurs across the spectrum.

to capitalism in ways that might put people off.' Which is at best self defeating, but this commitment to watering down radical politics can be seen across the board where there is a clamour to the holy grail of the 'mainstream'.

An unwillingness to embrace difference is a sign that the scene is turning in on itself, no longer reaching out to the public but marginalising itself. Purity and dogma become intertwined and excluding. Both movements are guilty of this. More care needs to be taken by anarchists and animal activists alike, to prevent the 'organisation' becoming more important than the message, and internalising the message to such an extent that any challenge or discussion is perceived as a personal attack, instead of a way to improve ideas and give us all the reality check we need from time to time.

We are not unsympathetic to the insurrectionist position, but part of the politics taken up in its name does concern us. For instance, while we see getting rid of the capitalist system as fundamental to removing current expressions of abuse and oppression to humans and animals alike – the Animal Industrial Complex being as much a part of capitalism as the Military Industrial Complex – this is not an end in itself. Insurrectionism is a tactic, and as such does not absolve us from asking questions about how we in our everyday lives perpetuate capitalism and other forms of domination, especially when there are alternatives available.

## **3. Anti-Moralism**

The most vociferous opponents of veganism (which we I say deliberately because they rarely if ever actually talk about animal-human relationships, how they operate under capitalism and how it could be different under anarchism) tend to come from the staunchly libertarian anarchist wing – whether of the individualist libertarian anarchist traditions of the US, or the insurrectionists of Europe. Both have a strong anti-moral, anti-organisational streak to them that is ego-centric in its 'liberation of all desires' approach that rejects out of hand any other form of increasing social anarchism as somehow dominating.



## 2. Inconsistency

The focus on the lifestyle politics of those associated with animal activism usually fails to recognise that this is an issue across all philosophies and political activism, anarchism included. Many people fall into the trap of assuming lifestyle alone is sufficient politics, rather than the wider organising.

As anarchists we can easily take most of the criticisms made of animal activists and apply them to the various monocultures of anarchism and related radical lifestyle choices. The self-ghettoizing of anarchism, through attitudes and behaviours that actively deter people from having anything to do with us are all too apparent.

It is embarrassing to hear the argument that not being able to eat meat is putting people off from coming to a social centre, while ignoring the shite and grime and chaotic dis-organisation that actually does as much, if not more to drive people away. Or macho drinking cultures for that matter.

We do not down play the role of mainstream media in demonising the anarchist (and animal rights) movements. However, it is not an excuse to ignore the fact that we both often give them the sticks with which to beat us, and do not recognise how we alienate people in our day to day activities, regardless of the media. Years of doing animal rights stalls have taught us that it is possible to bypass the media and interact directly with the general public in ways that make our causes accessible to people, without losing the radical edge of our politics. Even with independent media, much of it can be seen to be serving itself, rather than seeking to reach out beyond radical scenes.

Though lifestyle is an important way of prefiguring the society we want to live in, it needs to be rooted in its radical politics. It must not be the sole thing we do. Otherwise, scenes become hollow, amounting to image, talk and music, where they have become detached from the commitment to wider social change they originated from – where ‘social change’ becomes nothing more than the pursuit of an identity. So people might say that ‘there is no point demonstrating ‘alternatives’

that justice for animals needs to be seized. Across this spectrum it is not uncommon to hear that all who are fighting for animals should be supported, regardless of their other politics, because they believe non-human animals are all that matter.

Both writers of this zine identify with the anarchist and animal liberation movements. For us anarchism and animal liberation are inseparable. We have read numerous critiques by anarchists (some of the more notable ones are listed in the resources at the end), and believe there are valid criticisms of the animal rights movement. However, some criticisms are overstated, and in particular we think a number of attacks on veganism are misconceived. We also think that the rights / welfare / reformist perspectives need to be challenged. In this we would like to break down some of the arguments and point out inconsistency on each side.

Throughout this article points are introduced which link to more detail in referenced articles, particularly with regard to the intersection between oppression of groups (e.g. on race, gender and sexuality lines) and the position of animals in society.



### *Welfarism*

Most of us who enter animal activism do so, initially at least, because we are shocked by some form of animal cruelty. We recognise that, for whatever reason, the abuse of animals is wrong. Some stop at that, seeing only the immediate cruelty of someone kicking a dog or drowning a litter of cats. Others have their eyes opened to the vast amount of abuse that often goes unacknowledged in mainstream society, and decide to no longer be complicit. They may then recognise the inconsistency of such positions in relation to their own personal behaviour and make changes to minimise their impact on animals, such as vegetarianism<sup>3</sup> or veganism.

Each realisation is the start of questioning of the implicit assumptions that animals are solely the property of humans, without worth, and thus to be treated as we wish. Of course there are many who never make the jump from cooing over pictures of cute, fluffy kittens to look at the bigger picture.

Even for those who move beyond this basic emotional reaction, this may never progress past the 'bigger cages' position, as the welfarist approach is characterised. These are groups which campaign for better conditions for animals, but don't question whether or not we should eat meat. For them the animal is still subordinate to the human, something to be patronised but ultimately for our use. They are fine with domestication and killing; it is the cruelty they are troubled by.

Many subconsciously retain the biblical attitude that god gave dominion to man over all the beasts (crude and gendered language deliberately kept). If animals have an intrinsic value in this world view, it is only in relation to our perceived needs (or the ones society encourages us to

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<sup>3</sup> Vegetarianism doesn't challenge the paradigm of exploitation. Some people transition to veganism through vegetarianism, whilst others believe they are doing something useful to help animals, but instead merely enforce the property status of animals.

the liberal capitalist society that shaped them (this can be true of even those claiming to be of the primitivist persuasion).

The implicit assumption is that animal rights cannot be incorporated into anarchism, or that anarchists cannot develop their own positions on animals and related issues. In many cases this leads them to adopt positions that are both classist and racist – such as those around the 'privilege' to be vegan. Examples being social centres needing to be 'inclusive' by serving meat, whilst ignoring the vegetarian traditions of many different cultures. Or assuming that people are so oppressed that not allowing them the opportunity to engage in mainstream oppressions creates a situation where people feel even further marginalised. For example, we know of one situation where it was argued that an anarchist social centre was told it should overlook the vegan policy of its kitchen for a homeless person's project. Thus inferring that the homeless have no intrinsic interest in animal liberation, because it is a luxury to consider such things when at the margins of society.

The assumption is that anyone choosing to become involved in animal liberation and become vegan is anything other than middle-class and white, which possibly is more of an indication of who they hang out with. These critics measure everything by their own particular culture – a somewhat imperialist approach – as if that culture has not been shaped by several hundred years of liberal-capitalist propaganda (and longer when you consider the correlations in oppression of women and animals under patriarchy).

Again, a tendency to criticise the people involved is not the same as criticising the ideas of animal liberation, though generally the two get conflated. Nor does it attempt to distinguish between those groups within the wider animal activism movement who are anarchist and have class politics, arguing as though everyone interested in animal-related campaigning must only be liberal / bourgeois. There are some exceptions, but most writing emerging from the anarchist milieu makes little effort to delve into the myriad political motivations of animal activists.



## Appendix

### Addressing some anarchist critiques of animal rights

It is not our desire to go in depth through the various 'anti-vegan' / anti-animal rights critiques produced by various anarchists and other radicals. A lot of them only have validity when applied to some parts of the animal activism movement or to obviously hypocritical practice. However, there are certain types of arguments that need challenging themselves, particularly in how they allow people to ignore the central issue of human-animal relations. We provide this appendix as a way of drawing attention to these themes.

#### 1. Emphasising bad practice

Criticisms are levelled at easy targets, inferring they are representative of all animal activists. These arguments are primarily recycled from mainstream prejudice about the reasons people have for adopting a vegan lifestyle. So, animal rights activists 'believe animals are more important than people'. Or, they 'overlook environmental destruction in their quest for plant based products'.

These 'reasons' exist to distract from the point of actually addressing the issue of animal exploitation. So we might hear that 'Hitler was a vegetarian' whilst the accuser opts to overlook that vegetarianism is itself, a position of animal exploitation; or be accused of 'eating kumquats from New Zealand' where animal activists are implicitly accused of ignoring the environmental ramifications within such an absurd statement. Likewise, 'if you had to choose to run over a either a dog or a child...' in an attempt to confound an activist into making a statement that would 'establish' a belief in human supremacy.

Rather than developing their own theory of what relationships between animals and humans should look like, these critics are more interested in defending their own lifestyle choices without questioning where they come from, or whether they are assuming positions given to them by

have<sup>4</sup>). For the welfarist it is fine for cages merely to be larger and more comfortable, without ever asking honestly, why there should be cages at all.

We would go still further, and say that the welfarist approach has achieved very little, and what success has been achieved is the work of animal activists with stronger critiques forcing the issue – sometimes through direct action.

Far too often what is claimed as successes by the welfarists are a sham, with businesses more concerned with the marketing value of paying lip service to animal welfare (or the threat to their very existence in some cases<sup>5</sup>) than actual concern for the animals. One only has to look at the RSPCA's Freedom Foods to see how some animal charities have collaborated with industry, and become trapped in their own propaganda. Here, a scheme set up to give egg laying chickens more space and 'access' to the outside ('freedom'), became farcical in how farmers made the absolute minimum effort, and barely improved the conditions for the chickens at all. The RSPCA having committed to this course of action had to continue trumpeting its 'success'. In the end, only capitalism wins, as farmers could charge more for a product whose costs had increased only marginally.

#### *Welfarism as a 'tactic'*

Some people use welfarism as a tactic, even though their personal politics are more radical; for instance see Bruce Friedrich's work.<sup>6</sup> However, this approach has only really worked when placed within a

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that much of modern society's tastes have far more of a class basis than we like to admit, and as much informed by the desires of elites who benefit most from a hierarchical and stratified society. See for example, *Beyond Beef* by Jeremy Rifkin.

<sup>5</sup> Seaworld represents a good example of this point. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-28817407>

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich has been called a new welfarist; which is the belief that the issue of animal use can be resolved through improving welfare. The following debate with Gary Francione at the AR 2013 conference helps define Friedrich's ideas:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ1qFdR1cHA>



larger political framework of action, as has been successful in the anti-fur movement, and to a degree in the live exports campaigns of the 1990s - where mass physical mobilisation on a welfare issue facilitated the adoption of a more radical set of politics among those who took part. The adoption of stronger political stances on animals occurred because there was already a bedrock of animal liberation philosophy within the wider movement, which took precedence over efforts to pander to media or water down messages so as 'not to put people off'.

When not expressed in such a framework, welfarism only strengthens the notion that it is okay to consume animal products. No space is created to go beyond arguing for a patronising compassion. Nor is it able to challenge the 'right' to consume, or those arguments that it is necessary for medicine / diet. It does not matter what those putting forward the welfarist position believe, but rather what message their advertising and press implicitly want to send out.

The aims, strategy and tactics of the welfarist campaign is essentially dictated by the state alongside major institutions such as the corporate media, which provide the framework, social and legal, for what they can and cannot do to achieve their aims. By working for change within the system, welfarists are inherently constrained in order to be considered 'legitimate'. For example, it is acceptable within mainstream discourse to argue against any situation involving the physical constraint of others for economic use – such as in slavery or sweatshops – as individual humans have an intrinsic worth.

So if we are to accept that non-human animals have an intrinsic worth in their own right (however you take that word), it is inconsistent to promote the acceptance of imprisoning 'them' on economic grounds. Yet this is what welfarist campaigns implicitly accept.

We would also point out that welfarist campaigns, such as often emerge from animal rights groups such as PETA, play into dominant discourses such as sexism and the selling of women's bodies. In our experience this comes from an over-reliance on the mainstream media for getting the message out.

*Animal Liberation and Marxism*, Weekly Worker, 23 January 2014, <http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/994/animal-liberation-and-marxism/>

*Animal Liberation and Social Revolution*, Brian A. Dominick <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/brian-a-dominick-animal-liberation-and-social-revolution>

*Beasts of Burden*, anonymous pamphlet, October 1999, [http://www.tierrechtsgruppe-zh.ch/wp-content/files/beasts\\_of\\_burden\\_capitalism\\_animals\\_communism.pdf](http://www.tierrechtsgruppe-zh.ch/wp-content/files/beasts_of_burden_capitalism_animals_communism.pdf)

*Beyond Animal Liberation*, Subversive Energy, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/subversive-energy-beyond-animal-liberation>

*Veganism*, CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective, <http://crimethinc.com/texts/atoz/veganism.php>

*Domination and Consumption: An Examination of Veganism, Anarchism, and Ecofeminism*, Ian Werkheiser, 2013, <http://phaenex.uwindsor.ca/ojs/leddy/index.php/phaenex/article/view/4091>

*Green Anarchism: Towards the abolition of hierarchy*, Corin Bruce, Freedom Press, 29 August 2014, <http://freedomnews.org.uk/green-anarchism-towards-the-abolition-of-hierarchy/>

*Is Freeing Mink Terrorism? Questions We Should Be Asking Ourselves*, Lauren Gazzola, Truth-Out.org, 29 July 2014, <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/25222-is-freeing-minks-terrorism-and-other-questions-we-should-be-asking-ourselves>

*John Sanbonmatsu Responds to Derrick Jensen*, UppingTheAnti, <http://uppingtheanti.org/news/article/response-to-derrick-jensens-letter-from-john-sanbonmatsu/>

*Lost in the Fog of War: A Look at the Animal Liberation Movement*, Murder of Crows, March 2007, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/various-authors-a-murder-of-crows>

*Veganism is a Consumer Activity*, Peter Gelderloos, 4 June 2008, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/peter-gelderloos-veganism-is-a-consumer-activity>

*Veganism: Why Not (An anarchist perspective)*, Peter Gelderloos, 2011, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/peter-gelderloos-veganism-why-not>



Bob Torres, *Making a Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights*, AK Press, 2008.

### Online Talks

A. Breeze Harper and Lauren Ornelas, *The Colour of Animal Rights*, <http://vimeo.com/75827602>

Claire Kim, *Race, Species and Nature in a Multicultural Age*, <http://vimeo.com/71296790>

David Nibert, *Entangled up in Blue*, <http://human-nonhuman.blogspot.de/2013/05/david-nibert-entangled-up-in-blue.html>

Jennai Bundock, *The Hidden Cost of Patriarchy*, <http://vimeo.com/100087331>

Josh Harper and Scott Crow, *Animal Rights and Anarchism*, <http://vimeo.com/76933433>

Tina Cubberley, *WE ARE EACH OTHER: Towards a New Understanding of Intersectionality and Alliance Politics*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHQEvZchL0c>

Will Kymlicka, *Animal Rights, Multiculturalism and The Left*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gslf6xJ0Vuw>

### Websites on the politics of veganism

<http://BaringTeeth.noblogs.org/>

<http://TheTalonConspiracy.com/>

<http://VeganInformationProject.org/>

<http://TheVeganIdeal.com>

<http://Clowns-Corner.blogspot.co.uk/>

<http://foodispower.org>

### Articles

*Animal Liberation: Devastate to Liberate or Devastatingly Liberal*, anonymous pamphlet, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-animal-liberation-devastate-to-liberate-or-devastatingly-liberal>

Where such welfarist campaigns have value is where other groups are able to eat into their territory by suggesting more ‘radical’ alternatives, such as vegetarianism. Though these days welfarist organisations are more conscious of vegetarians and vegans (or rather of noisy criticism of their own hypocrisy<sup>7</sup>), until recently that was far from the case; it was not unusual for leading animal welfare charities to serve meat at their official dinners. Even now we hear of animal shelters having a meat barbecue or hog roast fundraiser. If it has changed, it is only because of pressure from the more radical end of the animal activist movement.

### Animal Rights

The welfarist does not question society as a whole, and cannot see beyond their role in sustaining it, and particularly how animals are perceived by it. There is no acknowledgement that most mass societies, but especially capitalist ones, are exclusively focused on human needs and pay only token service to the needs of other species.

Thus, if we want to change the position of animals in society, the logical step is to change society itself.

Hence, the animal rights movement asks the question ‘why should cages exist?’ It is a step forward in recognising and challenging society as a whole, and opens itself to interrogating our relationship to animals. If we recognise sentience, the ability to feel pain, an internal world richly populated by instinct and desires, then we should not simply see ‘them’ as property.

We start to see how we fit into a wider web of relationships with animals and the earth, and can explore our own connections with other

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<sup>7</sup> It has been pointed out by some reviewers that they are not being hypocritical, and on one level this is true as they are being internally consistent with their politics which allow for domination. However, these animal charities are not claiming the right to dominate but that they are ‘there for the animals’ and talk about how much they ‘care for them’, and how much they love seeing them ‘free’. Their claimed motivations and actions do not add up.



species. Being human does not mean being severed from the world in which we evolved. This is not to say there is a definitive answer as to what human-animal relations should be – a lot of energy has gone into exploring the possibilities of what intrinsic 'rights' animals have and on what basis, and the arguments continue. However, the important thing is that the question is there, integrated into whatever political approach underlines our actions, conscious or otherwise.

When reduced to bare bones, this is about the relationship that animals have with society, and this current situation of domination is perpetuated by the repetition of ideologies and habits we have subconsciously accepted. The animal rights activist sees only those answers to the issues of human-animal relationships which remain within the confines of current society. That is, changing laws, diet and belief structures to incorporate 'rights' for animals. So rather than merely being property, 'the beasts of the field', animals attain a position where they have a right not to be mistreated, commodified or killed for profit.. It is radical in that it wants to change society, reformist in that it does not question the fundamental assumptions of that society, naïve in failing to recognise these assumptions at all. It will always then be limited by those assumptions it does not recognise or question.

### *Liberation*

For us, if we want to free animals from human domination, we need to understand just how totalising domination is in current society – that animals are just one facet of a wider picture, which includes oppression of various groups of humans along the divisions of class, sexuality, race, and others. Much has been written about the intersection between the domination of animals, patriarchy, racial supremacy, and how they reinforce each other; so we will not repeat it here. But all this is not enough by itself. In order to understand why the intersection of oppressions emerged and how it is sustained by modern society, we need to dig deeper to those ideological aspects, those 'truths' so deeply entrenched that we never think to question them, which are the ideological or 'cultural' basis of society itself.

take the opportunity to avoid the inconvenient question of their relationship with other animal species.

Therefore, both sides need a willingness to understand the other and to recognise that we are far more powerful when actively accepting each other rather than continually fighting. That can happen when animal activists develop a better sense of class and anti-oppression politics,<sup>36</sup> and anarchists stop turning a blind eye to both animals and the planet.

## Resources

### Books

Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat (20th Anniversary Edition): A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Continuum, 2010.

Kara Davies & Wendy Lee (editors), *Defiant Daughters: 21 Women on Art, Activism, Animals and the Sexual Politics of Meat*, Lantern Books, 2013.

Jason Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance*, AK Press, 2011.

Marti Kheel, *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

David Nibert, *Animal Oppression and Human Violence*, Columbia University Press, 2013.

Barbara Noske, *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals*, Black Rose Books, 1997.

Will Potter, *Green is the new Red*, City Lights Books, 2011.

Elisée Reclus, *Anarchy, Geography and Modernity: Selected Writings of Elisée Reclus*, edited by John Clark & Camille Martin, PM Press, 2013.

Jeremy Rifkin, *Beyond Beef: the Rise & Fall of Cattle Culture*, Plume, 1993.

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 1906.

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<sup>36</sup> An interesting perspective was pointed out to us by an anarchist ex-prisoner (and vegan) who noted that many jailed animal rights/liberation activists speak of experiencing prison as something to just get through rather than to challenge the whole repressive system inherent in prison, while other animal activists also demand jail as appropriate punishment, ignoring the contradictions in this position.



Clearly there is a lack of critical analysis with some aspects of animal rights campaigning, and it follows that this is true of the animal rights movement itself. Without a solid grounding in politics, campaigning can become a lifestyle that fails to challenge the system of exploitation. As Tina Cubberley<sup>33</sup> quotes: 'We need to do something, and this is something, so we should do that.' This reflects a broad acceptance that any activity with the intention to help animals is necessarily a good thing. Some of these frustrations have already been expressed in the pamphlet 'Devastate to liberate or devastatingly liberal.'

Commonly the scene that develops around liberal interpretations of campaigning leads to the creation of what is 'in' (fashionable) and what (or who) is 'out'. This encourages a sense of belonging amongst identified members whilst reinforcing, and conforming to conventional systems of human domination. The result is something which anarchist (and vegetarian) Elisée Reclus<sup>34</sup> referred to as 'building a house in the woods', implying that groups can become estranged from the outside world. Without the necessary element of openness, a scene becomes bogged down by a lack of dialogue with a broad range of people and ideas. This can also have the affect of curtailing acts of solidarity and co-operation with different 'groups'<sup>35</sup> that are supposed to have similar political aims.

The converse can be true; where activists on the left have focused on conventional stereotyping of all animal rights activism or vegans, they

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<sup>33</sup> Tina Cubberley, *Outrage has no weapons*, Vegan Information Project.  
<http://veganinformationproject.org/video-outrage-has-no-weapons-a-talk-on-direct-action-by-tina-cubberley/>

<sup>34</sup> See *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Elisée Reclus*, edited by John P. Clark and Camille Martin, PM Press, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Anarchism looks toward commonality rather than focus on that which is divisive. For an interesting discussion on group think: <http://veganinformationproject.org/vip-podcast-number-1/>

We live in a society built on notions of private property, meritocracy and technocratic / political / economic elites in power by some right they have conferred upon themselves, just as much as some humans assume the right of power over other groups of people, animals and the earth itself. It is a hubris we have been convinced to let them get away with because they provide promises of income and security at the price of many of our freedoms. Actually, we never had a choice; we are in a pre-existing framework and through media and education we are indoctrinated from birth to believe it is the 'natural' order of things – including the use animals as we see fit.

Domination and hierarchy are built into the very structure of many of our societies, argued for ideologically by conservatives and the right-wing, and often adopted by the left-wing as well. Yet, as pointed out in numerous articles and talks (see resources below), domination over one is domination over all. We will not be made free one category at a time, but only in a collective process that recognises, for example, that when a person is racially abused by being compared with an animal it is then an attack on both that race and animals. The answer is not to trade oppressions, as that merely re-enforces the hierarchy, but to destroy the hierarchy altogether.

How we do that is a matter for strategy and tactics, but the core aim must be there – that of recognising the need to challenge all domination, no matter what form it takes. This has already been recognised in various parts of the animal liberation movement – in particular, the second clause of the Animal Liberation Hallmarks:<sup>8</sup>

*Unequivocal rejection of all forms of domination, exploitation and discrimination against humans based on arbitrary distinctions such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religious belief.*

Domination, exploitation and discrimination are based on hierarchies (implicitly and explicit), and all hierarchies and meritocracies enslave. They create subordinates and 'others' as groups to be directed,

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<sup>8</sup> There is a dedicated website at <http://www.al-hallmarks.net/>



managed, used and exploited in the service of dominant groups. Justified continued domination by a few, is often made in the name of economic need, superior intelligence and moral judgment, and by false claims to represent the 'many'. In a meritocracy, anyone clever or hard-working enough is able to do better, but only by standing on the backs of others, and in doing so ensuring that all but a few are held down. At the bottom of this hideous pyramid are animals and the planet. Once you apply this basic class analysis, you rapidly see how hollow the notion of 'rights' are, especially those that are trumpeted as 'human rights'. In a system that is inherently unjust, it will never be anything but a superficial claim, quickly overturned once elites deem it necessary for their ongoing accumulation of wealth and the maintenance of their position of power.

Our personal political journeys have taken us from animal-related activism to a recognition that at the heart of our politics is a desire to challenge all forms of domination, not just for ourselves but for everyone and everything caught up in that domination. However, given that domination and commodification of every aspect of society is the basis of the liberal-capitalist system we live under,<sup>9</sup> it follows that such a goal cannot be achieved working solely within that society – something encapsulated in the famous words of Audre Lorde: “*the master’s tools cannot demolish the master’s house*”.

This is what makes us anarchists first and foremost. It underlies the decisions we take and shapes our actions. It makes us animal liberationists in that we believe animals should be liberated from the same systems of domination that are also in place to oppress people. Thus, it is obvious to us, that we are not natural allies with those on the political right who claim to be animal rights activists, and in the same breath we equally condemn the sexism of PETA and the racism expressed by some campaigners.

Anarchism recognises that domination is part and parcel of the structure of modern society – from the liberal tripartite system of parliament,

effectively amount to cultural imperialism<sup>32</sup> when justifying their opposition to one form of slaughter – whilst ignoring many others that can be considered equally as objectionable.

When governments dabble in areas of animal rights it is because they are cynically manipulating the fact most people believe the welfare of animals does matter in some way. Yet many forms of animal rights activism are merely a direct appeal to government. There is little analysis by activists that governments ignore the issue of animal use itself for fear of unleashing an avalanche throughout the Animal Industrial Complex, as consideration for one group of animals leads to another and then another. Even in the most severe cases of animal torture, such as the foie gras industry, the British government remains intransigent about banning its import.

This does not usually deter the largely futile appeals to government from various animal rights organisations. So it is worth remembering where we have been most effective, because both Hillgrove cat farm and Consort beagles were closed down through overwhelming pressure from a radical movement not afraid to take direct action – not the RSPCA, BUAV and their endless 'dialogue' and petitions. Also, the 'ban' on fox hunting was consistently ignored despite overwhelming public support, until Tony Blair decided to appease voters and Labour MPs following his taking Britain into the Iraq war. The lesson to learn here is complete cynicism toward the current political system, not just with individuals and parties.

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 1954.

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<sup>32</sup> See for example, the discussion by Claire Kim, *Race, Species and Nature in a Multicultural Age*, available at <http://vimeo.com/71296790>



and the Far Right have long used issues such as halal to falsely separate that which is 'humane', the western way of butchery, and that which they perceive as 'inhumane'. Whilst some nationalists follow a plant based diet<sup>29</sup>, far more attempt to unsuccessfully condemn one form of slaughter whilst supporting another, without a moment of consideration to the life of an animal on a factory farm.

Recently some governments have also been using their interpretation of 'animal rights' for political gain, such as those banning halal methods of slaughter,<sup>30</sup> where they state that 'animal rights come before religion'. However, there are different ways that governments seek to exploit animal use for political gain. For example, when US diplomat to Japan Caroline Kennedy<sup>31</sup> expressed 'deep concerns' over the Taiji dolphin and whale hunt taking place, and the Japanese government responded in turn by pointing the finger at US factory farming practices.

Talk about what is 'humane' is Orwellian double-speak to make us focus on the question over which sort of death causes the least harm, rather than to ask the important question as to whether they should die at all. However, it is worth pointing out that it is not just governments that engage in this form of discussion. A similar situation has arisen for campaigning groups where they ignore the importance of a strong underlying vegan message to demonstrate opposition to all forms of animal exploitation. Instead, they become mired in arguments that

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<sup>29</sup> Veganism is not exclusive to any type of politics. Anyone can recognise animal suffering, and some even believe fascism is the best opportunity to achieve animal liberation.

<sup>30</sup> Adam Withnall, *Denmark bans kosher and halal slaughter as minister says 'animal rights come before religion'*, The Independent, 18 February 2014.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/denmark-bans-halal-and-kosher-slaughter-as-minister-says-animal-rights-come-before-religion-9135580.html>

<sup>31</sup> *US ambassador to Japan 'deeply concerned' about dolphin drive-hunting*, The Guardian, 19 January 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/19/us-ambassador-japan-caroline-kennedy-dolphin-drive-hunting>

judiciary and government, to all forms of capitalism whether in its apparently friendlier forms or in neoliberalism. The 'Animal Industrial Complex' (AIC)<sup>10</sup> is an integral part of this society. Layer upon layer of abuse and domination has been built up on the back of animals, as much as it has been in regard to women and colonised peoples. As with sexism and racism, it depends on people seeing animals as different and inferior ('other'), and thus existing to serve the dominant.

As many authors have argued, Carol Adams, Barbara Noske and David Nibert among the most prominent of them (see resources), that the Animal Industrial Complex is as much part of modern liberal capitalist society as the Military Industrial Complex. Bob Torres points out in his book *Making A Killing*, that as with many other abuses of capitalism, the ability to commodify animals rests on the ability to characterise them as property.<sup>11</sup> Just because we no longer have an economy built on a traditional understanding of slavery, class analysis show us that it is still present, only better hidden, wrapped up in 'wage-slavery', laws of private property and 'economic necessity' that hold everyone down except the elites.

The pulling back of this veil of abuse and domination is a key feature of anarchism. Too often we hear animal activists moan about people who cannot see the obvious abuse before them, whilst missing so much of their own indoctrination by liberal-capitalist society (or even praising it). While we talk of the commodification of animals, we miss how much else is also being stolen from the commons and turned into

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase was coined by Barbara Noske in 1989 and subsequently defined by Richard Twine as a "partially opaque network of relations between governments, public and private science, and the corporate agricultural sector. Within the three nodes of the complex are multiple intersecting levels and it is sustained by an ideology that naturalizes the human as a consumer of other animals. It encompasses an extraordinarily wide range of practices, technologies, identities and markets".

<sup>11</sup> It does not matter for our argument if they are collectively-owned or privately-owned, they are still considered property.



private property.<sup>12</sup> If we do not see the way our environment is constantly being appropriated to be exploited, then we are part of the underlying problem. As long as we are being played by capitalism we can never affect any lasting change.

It is worth recognising once again that capitalism and the state work in tandem, so legislation will always reinforce the primacy of property (regardless of what is claimed in the name of 'human rights') – including reforms in the guise of helping animals. This is the reason why legislation designed to protect animals from cruelty often ends up making things worse in the long run.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, there is discontent about the misreporting of our causes in the mainstream papers, or the pressure of the police on our protests, whilst failing to recognise how this applies to all non-dominant groups in society. Do we really think that newspapers are ever going to reflect our views or support our cause other than trivially, when they are owned by capitalists who benefit from animal exploitation and the structures that sustain it? Are we not missing a basic contradiction when we are 'happy' that the Daily Mail had an article about the cruel treatment of dogs being eaten in China? Its agenda is not to stop eating meat, but an excuse for a racist attack on the Chinese, while ignoring the vast cruelties in the UK. Is this presenting a change to society, or are we being placated by racism?

Do we also really think the police are here to protect us and our 'rights'? A key function of the police is to exert the power of the state –

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<sup>12</sup> Note, private property here, is not – as some looking to score simplistic points try to make out – personal possessions, but refer to those things which should be held in common-ownership for everyone, rather than in private hands to be exploited for the profit of a few individuals, such as land, water supplies, etc.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, see the 'Brown Dog' affair, where following a public outcry over the use of animals for vivisection, including riots, a Royal Commission on Vivisection was set up. It reported in 1912, paving the way for the Animal Procedures Committee which helped legitimise vivisection and turn it into an industry. For more see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brown\\_Dog\\_affair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brown_Dog_affair)

### *Some issues with animal rights campaigning*

A strong critique of single-issue campaigning in animal rights is of campaigns failing to draw attention to the system which underpins the exploitation of all animals. This has missed the bigger picture – where the symptoms instead of the causes have been addressed. A straightforward way to approach this issue is to present a strong 'vegan' baseline, which ensures that attention is drawn to the wider system that encompasses all animal exploitation.

Single issue campaigns,<sup>26</sup> such as those against the coalition government's badger cull in England, can present a good opportunity to engage with people who have already begun to consider the importance of animal life to a level where they are prepared to do something about it. Indeed, setting up camps based on vegan principles has introduced people to the broader aspects of animal exploitation in the dairy industry and beyond, whilst also critically examining government involvement in the affected cull.<sup>27</sup>

Food carries great importance, not least because of the regularity with which we eat, but also because of the necessity of food for survival. Food consumption habits are tied into class in various ways; for instance how the burgeoning middle class in China has led to increased meat consumption.<sup>28</sup> A class analysis provides an interesting way to view animal exploitation, as people use consumption of animals to reflect their social status. Food is also something which has traditional or cultural aspects which can make it distinctive to certain groups of people. So, there are groups that have utilised food as a divisive issue,

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<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting Jennai Bundock's point that it is a completely false distinction, as it is impossible to have a single issue experience within a campaign when you are dealing with (for instance) patriarchy, ableism, ageism, at every turn.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Owen, *Top Government advisor hits out at Defra for pursuing controversial badger cull*, The Independent, 23 June 2014. <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/top-government-advisor-hits-out-at-defra-for-pursuing-controversial-badger-cull-9557882.html>

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Watts, *More wealth, more meat. How China's rise spells trouble*, The Guardian, 30 May 2008. <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/may/30/food.china1>



Unfortunately, anarchists arguing for meat eating along this line often implicitly adopt a universalist approach (in conflict with their stated positions), believing that if it is okay to kill in some situations, then it is generally okay to kill in all. That is, once they have formulated this position they forget that each situation needs to be dealt with in turn, and analysed on its own merits. Advancing this position does not actually resolve their difficulty in justifying animal consumption, particularly their subsequent complicity with the Animal Industrial Complex. For consistency from an anarchist perspective, it should be argued that it is never right to incarcerate and enslave animals for the purpose of exploiting them for our own perceived benefit.

which means protecting their masters in government and the corporations. They are fundamentally part of the problem, as they enforce laws allowing animals to be treated as private property. When change becomes likely, the police will not act to support animals but instead move to protect vested interests, as happened with the use of the domestic extremism units against animal activists.<sup>14</sup>

### *Onto anarchism*

For us, this mix of class analysis and the desire to end domination is best articulated by anarchism, but it needs to be recognised that just as the animal activism movement has a diverse range of ideas in it, so does anarchism, some less thought out than others. And we recognise that it is in need of its own critiques – to counter those anarchists whose analysis is little better than sloganeering.

In considering ourselves animal liberationists, it is not simply liberation in the rescue of a given animal from a situation of abuse, though we support that without question. Rather, the liberation of which we talk is rooted in the freedom of people, earth and animals alike from systems of domination. As much as we challenge anarchists for accepting parts of the culture of liberalism and capitalism regarding animals, we should challenge each other to bring about a change to society that ensures freedom by removing the very basis of domination through private property and 'representative' democracy that in reality serves only to maintain the power of the few.

Even now we can hear the liberal animal activist complaint that we still need the state to stop people committing crimes and to prevent cruelty, and that is the best we can do. This view of humanity goes all the way back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century author Hobbes, when he characterised life as 'nasty, brutish and short', and most humans as being no better than

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the Corporate Watch reports into the crackdown on animal rights at <http://www.corporatewatch.org/issues/animal-rights> or the SOCPA 7 and Blackmail 3 trials (<http://www.blackmail3.org/>, <http://www.socpa7.org/>)



animals who are in need of a strong state for their own good. We as anarchists reject that view of humanity, and rather than using a particularly twisted view of animals to justify it, we turn to the work of one of the great early anarchists, the geographer Kropotkin, who wrote instead of a natural world as much full of instances of co-operation and mutual aid as it was cruel. As long as we fail to think of animals as creatures full of social life and individual desire, then we are falling for the same trap that justifies dominating them and other humans.

So we reject the view that humans and all other animals are shaped solely by a drive to dominate each other, which needs to be controlled. Rather, we argue this view was developed to justify existing domination over humans and animals alike by the powerful. The Victorian phrase “red in tooth and claw” was used to justify imperialism and fascism by creating a particularly false view of humanity, and we should not fall for it. As animal activists we should know better than most there is extraordinary co-operation and internal life in the animal world.

Some of the other criticisms aimed at veganism by Peter Gelderloos, and by Deep Green Resistance founders Derrick Jensen and Lierre Keith (author of *The Vegetarian Myth*) originate from an attempt to apply an idealistic way of living which allows them to continue conforming with animal exploitation in the capitalist system whilst arguing against the system as a whole. Meat consumption is justified because of ‘tradition’ or ‘naturalness’<sup>25</sup>, and because it is something that previous cultures have engaged with when living in ‘balance with nature’. For them consumption of animal flesh in a capitalist society is a better way of living than the rejection, merely because it is consistent to their way of thinking, suiting their personal desires rather than being based on a logically argued position. They argue it is a positive thing to consume animals because their own animal instincts tell them to do so, and this justification could be used for many activities regardless of how violent, antisocial or abhorrent. It seems that we should always be suspicious when authors use words such as natural, traditional and instinct, as they often ignore the large differences in human society, social conditioning and the ecological web, where people cherry pick examples to support their claims, and ignore counter arguments.

It is also useful to point out that killing isn’t intrinsically wrong when it comes to necessity. So we believe it isn’t always wrong for a human to kill another animal, nor is it wrong for a shark or elephant to kill a person, or for a person to kill another person. However, the issue that it is not intrinsically wrong to kill does not in any way excuse the act of killing for pleasure or in cases that it is not necessary for absolute survival. The justification for killing another sentient being depends very much on context.

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<sup>25</sup> Though humans are omnivores, we can also choose to be herbivores in many situations. It also tends to overlook that in ‘traditional’ or pre-historic diets, ‘meat’ consumption was not nicely fried steaks, but as much about eating insects or raw flesh, something conveniently overlooked by those who rely on the ‘naturalness’ of eating meat.



firmly on the vegan product<sup>23</sup>, selling liberal consumerism that 'helpfully' removes animals from the equation to provide a new campaign approach. An approach which emphasises the new normality of consuming plant based foods and items, and how they can reflect conventional tastes and safe recognisable appearances. Whereas the Vegan Society would say that one commodity is similar to another and encourage a person to give the plant based alternatives a try, Gelderloos would say that all commodities are equal from the point of production, so therefore within the capitalist system it makes no difference to choose one from the other. The trouble with this approach is how the emphasis on the commodity intentionally overlooks the situation that animals find themselves in; as animals become the 'absent referent' even though they are at the heart of the argument. As Paul Watson says<sup>24</sup> 'his clients are the whales'; well the clients of The Vegan Society should be 'the animals'. Something that both Gelderloos and the Society overlook in their pursuit of normal / natural (delete as appropriate) eating behaviour.

Animal Liberation can be defined as the freedom for non-human animals to live outside of human society. Non-human animals don't (for the most part) choose to be a part of society, so it makes no sense from an anarchist perspective to pursue an agenda where they are forced to do so for our own perceived gain. There are few relationships between 'man and beast' that can be deemed mutualistic; rather their foundation is exploitative. From the cute kittens purchased for company and entertainment, to the dogs that form a status symbol, there are few, if any, ways in which people interact in conventional western society with domesticated animals that can be deemed equal and respectful.

The simplest way to address this issue is through freeing animals from the tyranny of human society and by doing this, essentially just leaving them alone. Therefore, not breeding or putting them in vivisection laboratories, not consuming their farmed flesh, nor putting animals into zoos and so forth. Essentially this is liberation from human society and back into the wild. Of course the wild these days is a pale shadow of anything it once was, and the continued exploitation and subsequent devastation of the natural environment is a significant issue when it comes to animal liberation.

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<sup>23</sup> The corporate approach is not exclusive to veganism or animal rights.  
<http://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/18/08/2014/book-review-protest-incorporatization-activism>

<sup>24</sup> Paul Watson, *I must serve my clients, the whales*, The Guardian, 31 August 2012.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/aug/31/paul-watson-clients-whales>



## An Anarchist context for Veganism and Animal Liberation

*'The word "veganism" denotes a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude — as far as is possible and practical — all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.'*

This definition from The Vegan Society<sup>15</sup> helps clarify an issue raised by some anarchists who believe that veganism is inherently dogmatic. The term 'as far as is practical and possible' is an essential aspect of veganism, because it recognises the way that capitalism and oppressive organisational structures can function to hinder access to plant based foods (or indeed to food at all). This appears equally important for those promoting veganism to understand, for it is clear to us that where vegans fail to engage with the complexity of human society it can lead to veganism appearing as just another example of one group attempting to dominate another.

From the vegan perspective we are taking, the issue of domination arises in part because there is a continuation of the human / animal dichotomy within much of what passes for 'vegan campaigning' itself. By focusing on the non-human animal, we forget or deliberately overlook the human situation;<sup>16</sup> which is relevant because humans are

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<sup>15</sup> Definition of Veganism, The Vegan Society, <http://www.vegansociety.com/try-vegan/definition-veganism>

<sup>16</sup> At the far end of this spectrum are some vegan campaigners who appear to simply hate all humans. Most prominent at the moment is Gary Yourofsky, though it is a viewpoint we've heard quite a number of times, most recently with Animals First. Usually it is justified by the statistic that more animals suffer than humans. However, this is a simple failure of identity politics, where one issue is placed above all others uncritically, and a logical dead-end that fails to recognise how abuse of animals and humans alike are inextricably interlinked. Haggai Matar, *Can animal rights take precedence over human rights?*, +972mag, 12 November 2013. <http://972mag.com/promoting-animal-rights-at-the-expense-of-human-rights/81628/>

It can also be dependent on where you live; being vegan in a large city can be less problematic than a rural village. Capitalism plays a hidden hand here with its control over production, distribution and tendencies towards mass production.

For this reason it has been suggested that the plant-based diet reflects privileged status, where only those who have the time and money to obtain, prepare and eat wholefoods can pursue this form of consumption. Thus, the complexity of social division needs to be addressed within veganism, especially where 'go vegan' slogans fail to take into account the discrimination and oppression that exists in society which in turn can make veganism problematic.<sup>20</sup>

An example of an attempt to counter some of these issues is Ron Finley's guerrilla gardening project in South Central Los Angeles. This project emphasises the challenge to access plant-based foods, and demonstrates how people can take back control over what happens in their community from councils and state departments, where public land has been taken over by the community to grow fruits and vegetables that are not readily available.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, people have also set up food cooperatives to provide easier access to food through combining purchasing power.

Is veganism merely a 'lifestyle choice' as anarchists such as Peter Gelderloos have argued? He appears to be in reasonable company as the recent Vegan Society<sup>22</sup> campaign has taken the radical and 'brave' step of no longer promoting veganism (their new slogan being 'you don't have to be vegan [...]'). The focus of the new campaign rests

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<sup>20</sup> This is a critique of simplistic campaigning only; as we point out elsewhere, this does not deal with the privilege contained within other diets. For example, as recent food-scandals demonstrate, not all meat is equal as access to types of meat can be class-based in itself. Nor do those favouring animal consumption acknowledge how much they are repeating propaganda from the meat and dairy industry itself.

<sup>21</sup> See Ron Finley, *A Guerilla Gardener in South South Central LA*, TED talks, [http://www.ted.com/talks/ron\\_finley\\_a\\_guerilla\\_gardener\\_in\\_south\\_central\\_la](http://www.ted.com/talks/ron_finley_a_guerilla_gardener_in_south_central_la)

<sup>22</sup> Jasmijn de Boo, *Why Everyone Is Falling in Love with Veganism*, Huffington Post, 4 May 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jasmijn-de-boo/veganism-diet-trend\\_b\\_5254048.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jasmijn-de-boo/veganism-diet-trend_b_5254048.html)



## *On being vegan*

This leads us to consider certain aspects of veganism and whether it is actually ‘easy’? Is it possible to live simply on a plant-based diet? Certainly, veganism generally involves the act of doing something differently, such as choosing not to go to the animal circus, but going to see acrobats instead; or playing in the park, making kites or whatever it is that people enjoy doing that doesn’t involve the direct exploitation of non-human animals in a derogatory fashion. Also going out into the woods and seeing animals in the wild instead of in a zoo is another activity which is not particularly onerous but may not be so ‘exciting’ or as straight forward as seeing a tiger that is bored shitless in a cage (or “enhanced habitation zone”). So, in this sense it is achievable when you are interested, curious and determined about the alternatives to mainstream forms of entertainment through animal exploitation. The same can be broadly said for the food we eat, though it is a more complex matter.

For many the choice to adopt a plant-based diet goes against the conventions of society and so it is a situation which is not necessarily ‘easy’, because standing up for the lives of animals that have little or no value in the current system can invite ridicule. The difficulties with living differently are exacerbated further when you are near the margins of society due to difficulty accessing plant-based foods – something which is restricted by the nature of capitalist society, as people don’t have the same access to certain nutritional foods because of the shops in the locality,<sup>19</sup> affordability, time, lack of land to grow your own (if you want to), and ease of consuming cheap meat based fast food alternatives that quickly satisfy cravings for salt, fat and sugar. In part this can be due to unemployment, or working long hours on a low income.

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Food deserts can be described as geographic areas where residents’ access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables) is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient travelling distance.’: definition taken from <http://www.foodispower.org/food-deserts/>

animals, and, if we are to be consistent then we must look to challenge exploitation and cruelty across the board. Subsequently, the recognition for inclusive campaigning has led to increased awareness of intersectionality, whereby we explore the (mutually reinforcing/co-constructed) relationship between the domination and exploitation of animals and how this affects people. So a valid criticism of much of current veganism is that it overlooks the suffering and exploitation of people in the food industry. Enslavement on cocoa and tea plantations for example; or mass exploitation of workers on very low wages so people in the West can get their tomatoes, blueberries and sugar snap peas regardless of season. To be clear, we are critical of those vegans who celebrate the wonderful ‘cruelty free’ plant based products whilst directly financing human suffering.

In our personal experience, finger-pointing anarchists can be critical of these same vegans, yet frequently consume these products, in addition to animal products which have exploited humans as well as animals. Their ‘arguments’ pointing out the apparent hypocrisy in the ethics of vegans eating ‘quinoa from Bolivia’ or ‘green beans from Kenya’ are little but misdirection; they wish to avoid the same logic being applied to their taste preferences for the flesh of animals, or to face up to how they have been socialised to desire meat. These ‘arguments’ do nothing to encourage those on a plant-based diet to seek out better ways to challenge broader exploitative systems, which would be a more constructive approach.

It is important for vegans to look at how they interact with broader exploitative systems, as there is a tendency to instead turn inwards and examine veganism to the nth degree. This is partly because the way people have chosen to live as self-identified vegans is open to a wide degree of interpretation. On the one hand there are people who approach veganism as if it were a t-shirt to pull on and take off whenever convenient, whilst on the other, there are the completely fastidious, all too ready to judge and accuse others who do not live up to their particular standards.



When veganism becomes puritanical, it becomes solely about the individual themselves, to the exclusion of all other issues. It causes them to miss the point that it is not possible to be 'pure' without collaborating with the current unjust system that facilitates that way of living – particularly when considering whichever direction we turn animals are dying for the items we consume, even where they are not directly being consumed or used by us.

One example is palm oil, found in a whole variety of processed foods (vegan or otherwise), the production of which is destroying vast swathes of rainforests, including many of the animals that are part of that ecology.

So there is a fundamental requirement for a comprehensive anarchist perspective on veganism, above and beyond the purity of one's own consumption, to enable an analysis of why there are so many different aspects of animal exploitation.<sup>17</sup> Some compromises are inevitable if they are not merely going to shift the problem elsewhere, so if the puritanical vegan really wants to fulfill their aspirations of a cruelty free life they need to recognise the limitations of modern society and act to change it.

There are critiques favoured by some people that conflate a 'plant based diet' with 'veganism'. Though opposition to the consumption of animals for food is a central aspect of veganism, it is by no means wholly representative. For example, the exploitation and use of animals through crass entertainment such as animal circuses, aquariums and zoos that incarcerate animals on false pretenses; petting farms that give a wholly inaccurate view of industrial life; or products which have been tested upon animals (a moot point when it comes to the sometimes unavoidable use of pharmaceuticals). Veganism is about all animal exploitation, so for us, it is disingenuous for those attacking it's perceived dogmatic ideals to ignore these aspects and reduce it to simply a plant-based diet in order to score points.

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<sup>17</sup> The analogy of the hydra springs to mind - cutting off one head and another two grow in its place.

It should be clear that we are critical of those who are obsessed with diet to the exclusion of everything else. But the reasonable response is to recognise that veganism is much more than just food-intake, and the broader perspective of animal exploitation is the level to challenge people on, rather than the futility of raising strawmen to simply knock down.

The emphasis on diet has another consequence, namely facilitating the co-option of veganism by capitalism. Fruitful campaigns to promote veganism have been supported and absorbed by the Animal Industrial Complex, as meat and dairy industries no longer see it as a threat to profiteering. For instance, large dairy firms have bought up some of their competitors in the non-dairy sector. So instead of fighting against plant based alternatives we can see how these products have been absorbed and promoted in a clear case of capitalism co-opting vegan products.

Peter Gelderloos<sup>18</sup> is one of a number of anarchists who have used this to suggest that veganism merely leads to the carving up of our preferences within a capitalist system, and as such veganism enforces and perpetuates the system by suggesting we can achieve our ends within it. Veganism in its simplistic, de-politicised form does allow for this to happen. Though, as we pointed out above, the answer is not to draw simplistic anti-vegan conclusions as they do, but to go for a more comprehensive approach that ensures veganism incorporates a proper critique of the economic and political systems around us.

If, as we argue, it is essential to address aspects of non-human exploitation in order for us to be able to abolish human exploitation as well, then we must take practical steps to achieve that end. Thus, we need to recognise that veganism has an essential place whether inside or outside of capitalism, and decide how it is we are going to put those ideas into practice.

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<sup>18</sup> See Gelderloos's articles *Veganism is a Consumer Activity* and *Veganism: Why Not*, both available at <http://www.theanarchistlibrary.net>. We would also point out there are a number in the anarchist milieu who readily cite the anti-vegan positions of Lierre Keith, Derrick Jensen and their Deep Green Resistance, despite their anti-anarchist positions.